

TASTE ALBERTA

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Quality that's sealed with a pinch

Homemade perogies have unique personality, makers say

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Edmonton Journal

THE DEETS

Perogies — handmade ones, anyway — are kind of like you and me. They each have their own personality.

"My sister makes a very distinctive perogy. I can tell by the frill — she always closes them with exactly five pinches," says Kathy Batorowska, master perogy-pincher and owner of Heritage Bakery & Deli in southwest Calgary. "And each perogy has a little divot on one side from where she holds it with her thumb.

"When we pack the perogies, we can definitely tell who pinched what. You can't go too crazy, though."

Batorowska and her crew of four to six employees pinch 250 to 300 dozen perogies daily, and each bag contains a unique assortment of shapes. Some are taller and skinnier, some are shorter and wider, and some sport Batorowska's sister's signature divot.

But they all have one thing in common: they are made by hand, with natural ingredients and no fillers whatsoever. Everything is made in-house, from scratch.

A similar scene unfolds in the basement of St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre in north Edmonton, the home of Baba's Own Perogies.

Here six Ukrainian babas limber up their fingers and report for duty at 6:30 a.m., ready to churn out 300 to 450 dozen perogies a day. And they really are Ukrainian babas — they all perfected the art of crafting perogies in Ukraine before immigrating to Canada.

Potatoes are boiled, dough and fillings get made, and the previous day's perogies are packaged. And yes, each baba has her own pinching style.

"Making perogies by hand is a dying art," says Cheryl Ostermayer, sales consultant for Baba's Own. "There are companies out there that offer 'homemade style,' but our perogies are actually handmade."

"It's definitely a labour-intensive process," agrees Batorowska. "You have to make the filling, you have to make the dough and then you have to put the two together.

"But when it comes to the taste, it's so worth it. Our

Edmonton: Baba's Own Food Products; 7404 139th Ave.; 780-472-4529

Calgary: Heritage Bakery & Deli; 1912 37th St. SW; 403-686-6835

dough is more delicate, our fillings are more flavourful and we use minimal seasonings, just like they did in the olden days ... what can I say? A commercial perogy is just not a perogy."

Heritage Bakery & Deli has been churning out perogies for "a good 20 years." Batorowska's parents opened the bakery in the mid-1980s, when they emigrated from Poland. Times were tough, so they began serving lunch, where both perogies and cabbage rolls made an appearance on the menu. Both items became so popular that the Batorowskas started freezing and selling them.

"Perogies quickly became the No. 1 seller, so much so that we no longer bake bread. We've actually converted all of Dad's baking equipment into perogy-making equipment.

"My parents are retired now, but we still use my mom's recipes. They're not written down, though — we go purely on taste."

Baba's Own perogies are also based on age-old recipes but here, too, a recipe rarely gets pulled out.

"It's all done by feel," says Ostermayer. "We're still using the same recipes we started with in 1991, just with a few tweaks."

It was the residents of St. Michael's who actually started the perogy-making tradition. They missed the traditional Ukrainian foods they had grown up with, so they began making perogies for dinner once a week. The dinners became so popular that the residents couldn't keep up, so St. Michael's hired a few Ukrainian babas to take over the perogy-making duties.

"At that point St. Michael's decided to start selling them too," explains Ostermayer. "St. Michael's is a non-profit organization, so all the proceeds go back into helping out the seniors."

The perogies the babas so



PHOTOS: GREG SOUTHAM/EDMONTON JOURNAL

Hanna Volovich makes perogies by hand. It's a labour-intensive process, but Baba's Own Perogies churns out up to 450 dozen a day.



Perogy makers at Baba's Own in north Edmonton, from left: Vira Tsisislska, Leonila Pituley, Lyubov Basyuk, Irene Yakimova, Hanna Volovich, Vira Tymkiv and Olya Brana.

expertly pinch are now sold under the Baba's Own label online, at St. Michael's and at select Sobeys and IGA locations — most in and around the Edmonton area, but they can also be found in Lloydminster, Edson and Leduc. Baba's Own also sells cabbage rolls, perishky (baked cabbage rolls) and nalysnyky (cheese crepes), all made by the babas.

"Ukrainian food is still served in the dining room at least once a week, but the residents can request perogies every single night if they want," says Ostermayer.

"And our kitchen here is just like one you'd find in a baba's house.

"The ladies talk back and forth in Ukrainian, there's often Ukrainian music playing in the background, and every once in a while, someone even breaks into a little dance."

You'll find a variety of fillings stuffed inside both Baba's Own and Heritage Bakery perogies — everything from the traditional potato/cottage cheese to mushrooms, sauerkraut and even blueberries. Potato/cheddar is still the most popular flavour, though.



Baba's Own perogies are based on age-old recipes.

Batorowska takes a less traditional route when creating perogies for Calgary's trendy Perogy Boyz Food Truck.

"We do custom flavours for them, things like taco and carrot cake. Definitely not your typical perogy

"But I guess none of our perogies are. Try one. You'll immediately taste what a difference handmade makes."

Two dishes top Batorowska's list of favourite foods from her childhood.

"My mom's recipes never have amounts. She always says, 'Add what you need to make it good.'"

MEAT-FILLED PEROGIES WITH MUSHROOM GRAVY

Boil a package of meat-filled perogies. Sauté sliced onions in butter until soft. Add mushrooms. When lightly browned, add cream. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook until slightly thickened. Ladle mushroom gravy over cooked perogies.

PEROGY CASSEROLE

Boil any flavour of potato perogies. Toss in a casserole dish with sautéed onions. Garnish with an assortment of green onions, sour cream, bacon bits, cheese — whatever you'd like. Bake in a 350° oven until hot.

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